

May 19, 2000

Sen. Gregg Sums Up Democrats' Education Message:

"The Governors Are the Force of Evil"

The following is excerpted from the transcript of Senator Gregg's floor statement on May 9, 2000, during consideration of the Educational Opportunities Act [*Congressional Record*, p. S3633-5]:

Senator GREGG: On the other side of the aisle, I have been interested by the tenor of the debate. A large percentage of the positions taken on the other side have been to attack the idea of giving flexibility and power to the states, subject to accountability standards in the area of achievement. There has been a clear and aggressive response and attack coming from the other side of the aisle on the leaders of our states and our school districts across this country. It has been focused to a large extent on the Governors. There seems to be a deep suspicion on the other side of the aisle about Governors, which I find discouraging, having been a former Governor. I think there are about 12 or 16 of us in this room. I see one other former Governor in the room right now on the other side of the aisle.

Here are some of the quotes from Members on the other side of the aisle about Governors or state leadership. **Senator WELLSTONE:**

But honest-to-goodness, Washington, DC, and this Congress is the only place I've been where people say, 'Let's hear from the grassroots, the Governors are here.' I mean, Governors are not what I know to be grassroots. Could be good Governors, bad Governors, average Governors. But my colleagues have a bit of tunnel vision here thinking that decentralization and grassroots is the Governors.

Senator KENNEDY on the issue of local control:

What priority do these children get in terms of the states? They didn't get any priority when this bill was passed in 1965, even with requirements that the funds go down to the local community. This legislation is going to effectively give it to all of the states, as I mentioned. I think that is basically and fundamentally in error. As I mentioned, what are we trying to do?

A little suspicious about what would happen if the money goes to the states.

Senator SCHUMER:

I understand the desire to keep schools locally controlled. But a block grant, a formula for waste, and much of it going to the Governors, so that money doesn't even trickle down.

As an editorial comment, the evil Governors will get their hands on it.

Senator KENNEDY:

We need a guarantee. We don't need a blank check. We want to make sure the money's going to go to where it's needed and not go to the Governors' pet programs and pet projects and pet leaders in the local communities and their states.

Once again, the evil Governors strike. **Senator MURRAY:**

The Republican approach would take the things that are working and turn them into block grants, and their block grant does not go to the classroom. It goes to the state legislatures and--it goes to the state legislatures and adds a new layer of bureaucracy between the education dollars and the students that is so important.

There it is, the evil state legislatures. **Senator DODD:**

... What are we saying in this bill or trying to say is back in that community I won't be able to make it absolutely equal. But I would like to get some resources into that school. Now I've got to trust -- trust your good Governors.

Said with a bit of sarcasm, the Governors, once again, are being pointed out as being inappropriate sources to be trusted in our institutions. **Senator REID:**

What Republicans are saying essentially is let's give the money to the Governors; if they want to concentrate more efforts on low-income students, they can, but if they don't, they don't have to.

The Governors are the force of evil, it appears, in the educational systems of America.

It is very surprising language. I am tempted to say it is the Governors who actually have been doing the original thinking in the area of education. In fact, ironically, if you look at what has happened in education, you will see in the issue of class size reduction, which is such an important question we have debated on this floor, 22 states have implemented major class size reductions. In fact, most of those states implemented those projects before there was any class size initiative adopted at the Federal level.

In the area of school accountability, 40 states have initiated report cards already. These have been initiated, I suspect, by the Governors in those states, as was the class size initiative, I suspect, initiated by the Governors in those states.

In the area of charter schools, before there was any idea of a Federal charter school initiative, 2,000 charter schools had been initiated at the local and state level. Once again, it would be the Governors who initiated those charter schools; 2,000 of them have been initiated across this country. In fact, the National Educational Goals Panel, which is probably the most objective reviewer of what is happening in education, looking at it from a national perspective--they don't have too much of an agenda. They have a little agenda, but they have not too much, and the NEPA test is something that comes out of that agenda--said states such as North Carolina and Texas, which were cited by the Senator from Texas as states very effective in raising the scores of low-income students--they said in their studies they cannot attribute any gains to Federal activity. They attribute the gains to the fact that in the states, the local communities, the local policy has been the force for educational excellence.

I am not here necessarily to defend, carte blanche, Governors, because I suspect Governors make mistakes. But Governors have as their primary responsibility the issue of education. A Governor is not going to stop halfway through the day, is not going to stop talking about education and suddenly go on to the African trade agreement and the Caribbean Basin agreement, which is exactly what we are going to do in a couple of hours. Then we are going to be on to an appropriations bill on military construction. Then we are going to be on to an appropriations bill on agriculture.

Governors, for the most part, think about education probably 40 to 50 percent of their time. Why? Because 40 to 50 percent of the dollars that are spent at the state level in most states--not New Hampshire, ironically, but in most states--are education dollars. That is the biggest item in their budget, so they spend almost all their time on that issue.

It is not as if they come to this issue as some sort of force for darkness. But if you listened to our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, you would think so. This bill gives more authority to the state Governors and to the local schools and to parents and to teachers--by the way, subject, however, to significant accountability--and you would think the Governors were part of the Evil Empire, that they came from the dark side. Maybe you would think they are related to Darth Vader, if you listened to Senator Murray, Senator Reid, Senator Dodd, Senator Kennedy, Senator Wellstone, Senator Schumer.

So I decided to make up a chart. It is very obvious to me, as I listen to the debate, the other side of the aisle has met the enemy and the enemy is the Governors. That is the problem with education according to the other side of the aisle. So I

got pictures of all our Governors, our good Governors. I am sure they are all good Governors. A few of them are Democratic Governors. Surprisingly, a majority are Republican Governors. That was not the case when I was a Governor, but I am glad to see that is the case today. I am thinking to myself: All these good people, they are the enemy. I did not know that.

Poor Governor Shaheen, she has some problems in New Hampshire, I have to admit. She is trying her best, but she has had some tough times. She got some tough cards dealt to her. But she is really interested in education. I know that. She is a Democratic Governor.

I know some of our Republican Governors--John Roland, from Connecticut, he has dedicated an immense amount of thought and creativity to being a leader on education. I will bet there is not a Governor here, not one of these enemy Governors, who has not got a very creative idea on education moving in their state, an extremely creative idea, something we have not thought about here in the Federal Government, but something that is actually producing academic achievement by the kids in that state, something that is actually producing results.

That is an ironic concept for us in Washington. We don't necessarily work on results. We spent 35 years on title I, spending \$130 billion. We did not care about results. We did not care if the kids did any better. We wanted to get them in the school systems, and that worked, but we didn't really care whether they did any better. So now we bring forward a bill which says we care about the kids and we want achievement, and how is it attacked? It is attacked on the grounds it is going to give more power to the Governors and the Governors are really not responsible people and should not be given that power.

I have to say, I find that extremely disingenuous, just on the face of it. But I also find it inappropriate on the grounds that Governors really do care. They are pretty close to the people. They are elected just as we are. Some of them are elected more often than we are--in fact, I think most of them--so they are answerable to the people a few more times than we are.

[...]

This attack on this bill, which is quite honestly the gravamen of the opposition, is that we are taking the power out of Washington. Although I put it in humorous terms, that really is the gravamen of the opposition. We are taking the power out of Washington; we are taking the strings away from Washington; we are returning the authority back to people actually giving the education in expectation, with accountability standards, that we expect achievement.

That is the difference here. There is a lobby in this city that wants to maintain control over these dollars at all costs, even if it means the dollars are not

producing any results or any significant results that benefit the kids to whom they are directed. We have 35 years of record that show us these kids have lost out; we have lost generations of young children who were low-income, who were not able to pursue the American dream because they could not read and they could not write. We cannot tolerate that any longer.

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